MORAL PRINCIPLES AS THE BASIS OF ISLAMIC CULTURE

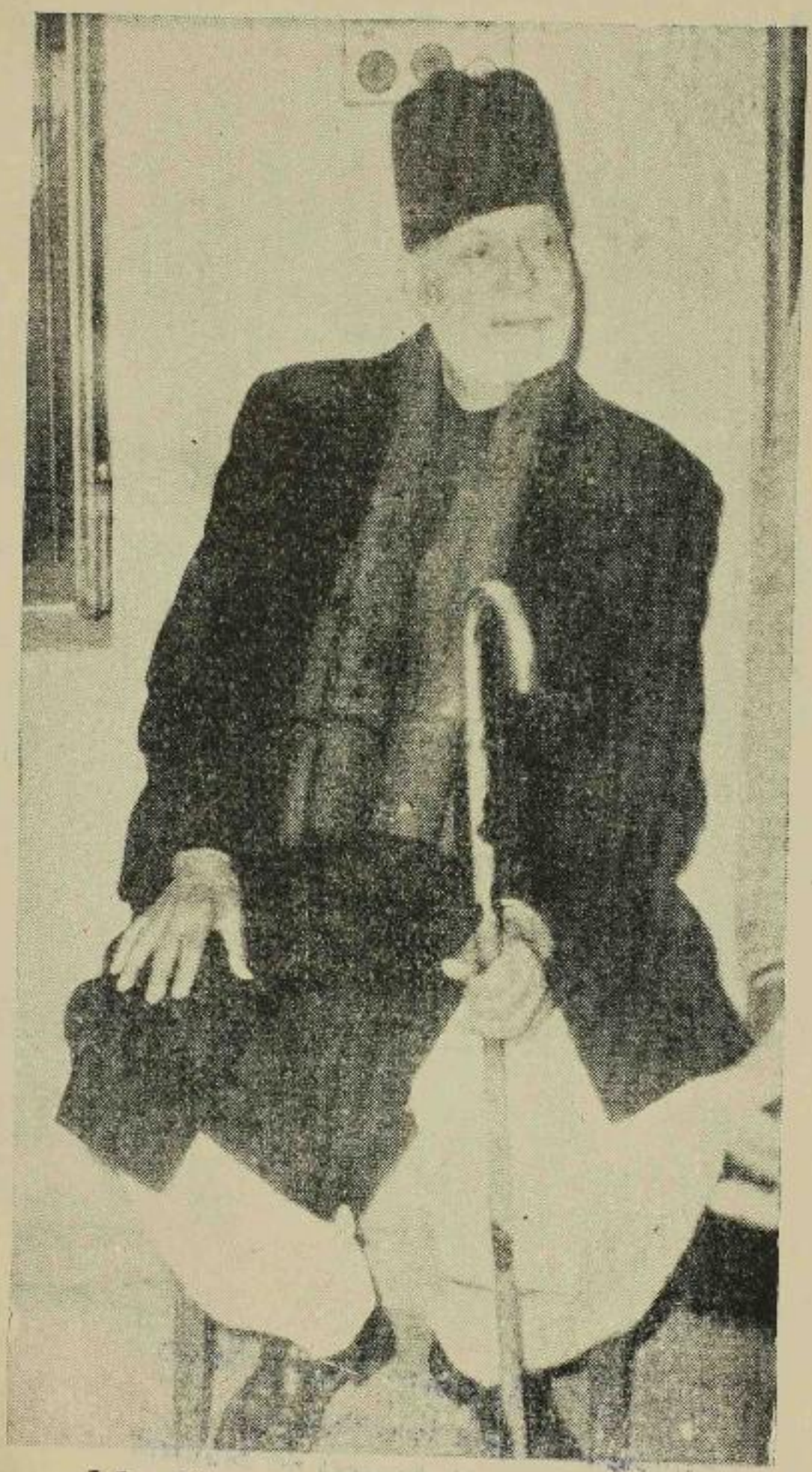
By
Sir Muhammad Zafrullah Khan Ahmadi
Formerly President of the International
Court of Justice at Hague

Prof Dr. Harnam Singh Shan
Principal Project Investigator
U.G.C. Research Project on Sikhism
605, Sector 16, Chandigarh.

570

Secretary for Missionary Work
AHMADIYYA COMMUNITY
QADIAN (India)

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org



Honourable Sir Muhammad Zafrullah Khan
Formerly President of the International
Court of Justice at Hague

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

Moral Principles As The Basis Of Islamic Culture

Belief in the existence of a Divine Creator has, in some shape or other, persisted throughout the history of mankind in the most backward as well as the most cultured and civilized sections. It is unnecessary for our present purpose to enter upon a determination of the question whether such belief is the result of the progressive exercise of human reason alone or has, as taught by Islam, been inculcated from the beginning through revelation.

Islam bases the culture that it seeks to promote upon the foundation of this firm belief. It teaches that the object of man's creation was to bring into existence a being endowed with faculties that should enable him to become a manifestation of divine attributes. The Quran says that before the creation of man God proclaimed: *"I have decreed the coming into being upon the earth of one who should be My Vicegerent and should manifest My attributes in himself."* (Ch. II, v. 30) This means, not only that the first man, or Adam, was to have these faculties but that man as such was to be endowed with them. At another place the Quran says: *"God is He Who has appointed you (mankind) His Vicegerents upon earth. Know, then, that he who fails to recognize this dignity and to act in accordance therewith shall be answerable for his neglect."* (Ch. XXXV, v. 39) The Holy Prophet of Islam has in turn exhorted the Muslims to equip themselves with divine attributes.

This article was written primarily for Volume VI, Science of Culture Series, entitled MORAL PRINCIPLE OF ACTION, edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen, Harper and Brothers, publishers. We express our deep gratitude for their kind permission to reproduce the article.

570

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

The Quran furnishes detailed guidance with regard to divine attributes, their respective spheres, co-ordination and method of operation. It thus becomes easy for a Muslim to equip himself with this knowledge and to mould and order his life accordingly so as to make of himself a manifestation of divine attributes in his own sphere to the fullest extent of his capacities. This is what Islam requires and expects of him.

Islam draws attention to the obvious fact that on the one hand, the universe manifests itself through the operation of the laws of nature; that is to say, the divine attribute of Creation brings into being oceans, islands, mountains, rivers, minerals, vegetables, trees, grasses, herbs and grains, etc. through the direct operation of a set of laws which are known as the laws of nature. On the other hand, God determined that there should be created a being who should exercise dominion over and bring into his service and use all these things in accordance with divine attributes and thus fulfil the ultimate object of all creation. In this manner each end, as it were, of creation would become a manifestation of divine attributes. In illustration of this object the Quran says: *"God is He Who has created for your use and service all that there is in the earth"*; (Ch. II, v. 29) and again, *"He has subordinated to you and subjected to your service all that there is in the heavens and in the earth."* (Ch. XLV, v. 13) This shows that man *as such*, and not any particular or individual man, is God's Vicegerent upon earth and that man, in his capacity of man, has been appointed by God as master over the universe so that through the exercise of the attributes of divine justice and divine mercy and divine love and divine knowledge, he should carry out in the universe the functions that pertain to creation and art.

There are two kinds of creation: one which results from the operation of natural laws and the other which results from the exercise of man's art and may be described as moulding or fashioning. For instance, clay is a primary natural substance and by processing it we fashion it into bricks and utilize these bricks along with other natural or processed materials for the purpose of various kinds of construction. In the same manner we quarry stone and cut it and fashion it for various purposes. Similarly, from different kinds of ores we

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

produce different metals and through smelting and refining and other processes prepare them for various kinds of uses. These processes may be of the nature of agriculture or industrial or manufacturing activities or other forms of application of science or skill to primary materials. This second category of creation or art has been left by God in the hands of man. But He ordains that man, being His Vicegerent, should exercise dominion over all primary materials and forces in accordance with principles which are based upon and reflect divine attributes.

For greater facility of regulation and for stimulation of initiative and enterprise and ensuring diligence and perseverence Islam recognizes individual ownership, but subjects all ownership to a moral trust which makes it obligatory upon the individual to use all property in the most beneficent manner for the service of mankind. God has created rivers but has not restricted the use of their waters for the benefit of any section of mankind. He has made oceans and has thrown them open to all His creatures. He has set up mountains and has not excluded any class from their benefits. He has made arable land fit for cultivation and has created no monopoly of its use. The same principle should govern the exploitation of natural resources by man. There is, however, this distinction: man is dependent, for the purpose of fulfilling his own needs and the needs of those for whom he is responsible, upon the utilization of these very natural resources and has, therefore, been permitted the appropriation of a certain portion of the fruits of his labour and the application of his skill for this purpose. Since, however, all ultimate sources of wealth are common to the whole of mankind, Islam enjoins it as a duty upon the individual that the utilization of these resources should lead to the widest and most beneficent distribution of the benefits resulting from such utilization so that in this respect man should reflect, through his acts and conduct, the divine attribute of Providence.

The principles that regulate a people's culture are based to a much larger degree upon moral and intellectual rather than upon material considerations. The rules governing social life regulate only its material aspects while culture emphasizes the intellectual angle of approach

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

towards social and material aspects. The basic principle which Islam has put forward even with regard to the conception of individual ownership elevates all social and legal relationships to a moral level. Man has been forbidden by Islam to entertain the notion that his apparent or legal ownership or proprietorship may be used for the purpose of causing damage or injury to others or to discriminate against them or to exclude them from the benefits of that over which his ownership or proprietorship has been recognized. The basic principle is that absolute ownership over the whole of creation belongs to God alone and that the dominion bestowed by God upon man over the rest of creation is in the nature of a trust. Man, as already stated, has been created so that he should become a manifestation of divine attributes. It is evident, however, that God is not dependent upon any thing. He is Self-existing and Eternal; everything is dependent upon Him, He does not stand in need of anything. But it is recognized that man is dependent for the continuation of his life and the fulfilment of his needs upon many things. He is, therefore, permitted the use of a portion of that which he owns for his personal needs and the needs of those dependent upon him. The universe has, however, not been created for the benefit of a class, section or individual. Man himself has been created for an object and a purpose which is common to the whole of mankind. Therefore, the exercise by man of the dominion that has been entrusted to him over the resources of the universe and the forces of nature must be for the benefit of all mankind. If this principle were recognized and accepted and the regulation of human relationships were based upon it, human activity in all spheres — individual, social, political — would become wholly beneficent and mankind would begin to live at peace with each other.

This is the basic principle if Islamic culture. Attention may, however, by way of illustration, be drawn to its application in particular spheres.

The second central point on which all revealed religions are agreed is that of prophethood. God reveals His will and His law through a prophet who in turn, communicates and interprets it to the

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

people. All systems of culture which base themselves upon a religion revolve round the status, personality and character of the prophet who was the principal exponent of that religion. A prophet is the ideal that a religion presents to its adherents to look up to and to imitate. The culture based upon that religion will thus reflect in all its aspects the personality and the character of its prophet. It is not my purpose to assess the position occupied by a prophet in the hierarchy of the faith that he teaches and propounds. I wish to draw attention to the influence that the position occupied by him and his personality and character would exercise upon the pattern of the culture that his people are likely to develop. Assume, for the sake of illustration, that a prophet occupies in the minds of his followers the position of an absolute authority everyone of whose dictates must be carried into effect. One inevitable consequence would be that all persons in a position of authority among that people would begin unconsciously to regard themselves as being vested with absolute authority in their respective spheres. It stands to reason that human nature in striving after perfection should seek in every respect to copy that which it has been taught to regard as perfect. It is necessary, therefore, to consider the conception of prophethood as taught by Islam in order to determine the principal features of the culture that Islam desires to promote and develop.

First and foremost, Islam teaches that a prophet is only one of the people. Regarding the Holy Prophet of Islam the Quran says: *"Say to the people, O Prophet, 'I am but a man like unto you'"* (Ch. XVIII, v. 110) This means that the highest spiritual authority (and in Islam the Holy Prophet was eventually vested with the highest secular authority also) is equally responsible with every other member of the community or society and that, so far as human judgment is concerned, he is equally liable to error*. The Holy Prophet of Islam uttered repeated and clear warnings against supernatural powers or capacities being attributed to him. He said on one occasion, "I am like anyone of you. Two of you may bring a dispute to me for ad-

---

*NOTE: Islam teaches, however, that *all* prophets are safeguarded against moral error and are thus free from sin.

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

judication and one of them may, through plausible arguments, succeed in persuading me that he is in the right and I may decide in his favour, while in fact and in truth the right may lie with the other. I wish to make it quite clear that in such a case the mere fact that I have given judgment in favour of the first, will not place him in any better position with regard to his rights, for in spite of my judgment he will be in the wrong in the sight of God. Such a person should therefore take warning and should, notwithstanding my judgment in his favour, make full restitution to the other party."

Secondly, a prophet is subject to the law in the same manner as other people. The Quran states with reference to the Holy Prophet: *"God has commanded me to keep the law in every respect and that I should conform to it wholeheartedly."* (Ch. X, v. 104, 105)

Thirdly, a prophet is bound to discharge his domestic obligations and responsibilities as fully and completely as he is bound to obey the law and to conduct himself as a good citizen. The Quran lays down: *"If either of thy parents or both should approach old age say not to them 'Oh', reprovingly, nor rebuke them and always speak kindly to them."* (Ch. XVII, ٧. 23) It is well known that the Holy Prophet's own parents died before he had emerged from infancy. Nevertheless, he has been directly addressed in this verse which is an indication that a prophet is as much bound by domestic obligations and responsibilities as any other member of the community and that he is not exempt from any of them on account of his spiritual eminence. In fact he must set up in his own person an ideal in all these respects for others to follow. There are several other verses in the Quran which emphasize this.

Fourthly, a prophet is bound by all moral obligations and is expected to set up and illustrate in his own life the highest moral standards. In this respect the Quran says: *"Hadst thou been harsh and hard-hearted thou couldst not have attracted thy followers into obedience,"* (Ch. III, v. 159) and again, *"Thou dost conform to the highest moral standards."* (Ch. LXVIII, v. 4) In a general statement regarding all

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

prophets including the Holy Prophet of Islam the Quran states: *"O Prophets you are not to use your authority or influence over your people to acquire benefits for yourselves. You are to use for your own persons only that which the law permits and must act appropriately in accordance with law on all occasions."* (Ch. XXIII, v. 51).

The Holy Prophet was, throughout his life, acutely conscious of this obligation. Shortly before his death he addressed his companions explaining that being only a man and one of them, he might have unconsciously trespassed against or wronged other people. He begged any person who considered himself injured or wronged by him to ask for redress or compensation so that before his death the Prophet might be free of all obligations toward his fellow beings and should not run the risk of being called to account by God for any of his acts that may have amounted to a wrong or a trespass against any of them. One of those present said, "On the occasion of the battle of Badr, O Prophet, when you were lining us up you crossed from one line to the other in a hurry and your elbow struck against my back." The Prophet, who was at the time lying prostrate with high fever, replied, "Then strike me with your elbow lest I should be called to account by God for the hurt that I caused you." The man answered, "When I was struck my back was bare but you are wearing a shirt." The Prophet then asked that his shirt may be raised from his back so that the man should be able to strike him on his bare back. His other companions who were present were greatly incensed against what they regarded as the impertinence and importunity of the complainant but had no choice save to obey. So his shirt was raised and his back was uncovered. The man who had made the complaint came forward with streaming eyes and kissed the Prophet's back. The Prophet was surprised and enquired why the man had so acted. He explained, "O Apostle of Allah, I had indeed been accidentally struck by you as I have stated. When you indicated that your end was near and offered to compensate or make restitution to any who might have been wronged by you I recalled the incident and the thought came to me that I might make it an excuse for kissing your back for we shall soon be parted from you." This incident illustrates to wh extent Islam has subjected

Prof. Dr. Harnam Singh Shan
Principal Project Investigator
U.G.C. Research Project on Sikhism
605, Sector 18, Chandigarh

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

the highest spiritual and secular authority to the law and has made it responsible for the discharge of even the lightest obligation. It is this principle alone that can ensure the due discharge of obligations on the part of every person including those who are set in authority over others. If a prophet or the Head of a State were to claim prerogatives or privileges that would put him in any respect above the law, every other person in authority would begin to arrogate similar privileges to himself

According to Islam not only is a prophet required to set an example and present an ideal in his own conduct but the law that a prophet propounds must also be perfect and be based upon the highest moral and spiritual principles. It is the moral principle behind the law which becomes the principal instrument for the evolution of a culture. It is a common error to suppose that a law, particularly a law propounded by a religion, may be propounded merely for the sake of the law itself or for the sake of emphasizing the authority, power or might of the law-giver. For instance, it is supposed that man is required to do worship as a mere act of homage to God or that he is required to fast as a symbol of his allegiance to God and that these acts have no meaning or significance in themselves beyond serving as tokens of obedience and allegiance. Islam repudiates this idea. The Quran says: *"Why do you imagine that God imposes obligations upon you which have no meaning or purpose?"* (Ch. LXXI, v. 13) One of God's attributes mentioned in the Quran is Hakeem which means that God does nothing without purpose and object. Congregational prayer which has been made obligatory in Islam, is an act worship. With regard to this, the Quran says, *"The Salat (i.e. congregational prayer) is designed to safeguard you against evil and improper conduct."* (Ch. XXIX, v. 45) In the same way the Quran explains that fasting has been enjoined *"as a safeguard against corruption, tyranny and arrogance."* (Ch. II, v. 183) The same applies to the whole of the Islamic law. Islam does not countenance the imposition of any obligation or the promulgation of any law or rule merely for the purpose of emphasizing power or authority. Every ordinance, rule, regulation must have a reason, a purpose, an object and these must be

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

designed to promote the welfare of the individual, the community or the state.

During the last years of his life the Holy Prophet of Islam combined in his person the functions of spiritual guide of the Muslims and of secular ruler of the greater part of Arabia. This was a unique position. His successors, though not prophets, also occupied the same position. They were known as '*Khalifas*', meaning Vicegerents. The regulations laid down by Islam for their selection and in respect of the discharge of their functions indicate clearly the moral basis of Muslim administration.

It has been explained that Islam teaches that God is the real and ultimate Master of the universe and that He has, within certain limits, entrusted mastery over the universe to man as such. A prophet, who is directly selected and appointed by God, thus becomes the Vicegerent of God and derives his authority directly from God. On the other hand, the Head of a State in whom may be vested the authority, for purposes of administration, with which man has been entrusted over the universe, is appointed by the people and is only a representative of the people. Islam has presented to us an instance of a Vicegerent who combines in his person both these characters and who is known as *Khalifa*. From one angle he represents divine authority and his selection bears the seal of divine approval; and from another angle he is the selected or elected representative and ruler of the people.

The Islamic rule with regard to the appointment of a *Khalifa* is that he must be either directly elected by the people or nominated by a directly elected *Khalifa*, the nomination being subsequently confirmed by the people. If the nomination should be rejected by the people after the demise of the nominating *Khalifa* it would become void. Once he is duly appointed, whether by election or through confirmation of his nomination, he is not liable to removal, for his appointment is deemed to carry with it the seal of divine approval. Inasmuch as a *Khalifa* combines in his person the authority for the exercise of spiritual as well as secular functions, he derives such authority both from God and from the people. His appointment becomes effective through the

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

exercise by the people of their right of election or their right of veto, but his removal is left to God through his demise. It must be remembered, however, that this applies only to a ruler who combines in his person the exercise of spiritual as well as secular authority and does not apply to a ruler or the Head of a State who occupies a purely secular position. In the case of the latter, his appointment and his removal are both left in the hands of the people. The Quran has made a clear distinction between these two types of rulers. With reference to the first type, it says: *"God promises those of you who believe and act appropriately that He will establish them as Vicegerents upon earth as He did in the case of those who have passed on before you."* (Ch. XXIV, v. 55) But with reference to the other type of ruler it says: *"God commands you that you should entrust political authority into the hands of those who are best fitted to exercise it and commands those into whose hands such authority is entrusted that they should exercise it justly and equitably."* (Ch. IV, v. 58) This shows that executive authority vests primarily in the people and that the people entrust it by election into the hands of certain individuals and these individuals are commanded to exercise this authority and to discharge their responsibilities justly and equitably. Individuals so appointed are liable to vacate their offices as may be determined by the people or they may be removed according to the will of the people, but so long as they continue in office they must discharge their responsibilities justly and equitably.

Islam provides a further safeguard by making it obligatory upon those in whom executive authority has been vested, whether they are *Khalifas* or merely secular rulers, that they must seek the advice of the representatives of the people on all important matters. The Quran says *"The Muslims should conduct their public affairs after mutual consultation."* (Ch. XLII, v. 38) Here, too, there might be a difference in the case of a *Khalifa* and a secular ruler. A Khalifa is bound to seek advice and normally he should accept the advice tendered to him unanimously or by a majority of the representatives of the people but he is competent to overrule such advice in the national interest. In the case of a secular ruler the matter is left to be regulated by the provisions in that behalf of the Constitution that may be framed for the regulation

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

of these affairs. It would be for the Constitution to determine the relationship between the ruler who, by virtue of his election, is the chief representative of the people, and their other representatives.

In the matter of his personal allowances the ruler is, in all cases, bound by the determination made by the representatives of the people. He is not subject to the ordinary jurisdiction of the courts in respect of his public acts, but with regard to his personal affairs, he is as much subject to the jurisdiction of the courts of law as any private citizen. There are instances where even a *Khalifa* was cited as a defendent in a civil suit in his personal capacity and appeared in court in that capacity.

One of the outstanding functions of a State is to establish and maintain friendly relations with other States. The cardinal principle emphasized by Islam in this connection is that all treaties, engagements and agreements entered into by an Islamic State must be fully and scrupulously observed, kept and carried out, even if they should operate to the prejudice of the Islamic State. In case it is established that the other party to a treaty is determined upon its repudiation or breach, the Islmic State is not permitted to repudiate it save after due notice which should ensure that no prejudice or disadvantage would be occasioned to the other side through such repudiation. In other words, an Islamic State is not permitted to make aggressive or offensive preparations against another State with which it is in treaty relationship even if it is convinced of the treacherous designs of that State save after due notice that from a date specified the Islamic State will no longer be bound by the treaty on account of its actual or clearly intended contravention or breach by the other side. This is designed to ensure that time should be available for the removal of any misunderstanding that might have arisen or for a renewal of the treaty, if this should be feasible, and that, in the last resort, the other party should not be taken by surprise and should have as much time available to it for making security arrangements as would be available to the Muslim State after it has become clear that the other party no longer intends to adhere to the obligations undertaken by it. The Quran says: *"Should you be convinced of the treacherous designs of a people with*

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

whom you have entered into an engagement or agreement then serve notice on them that the engagement or agreement is no longer binding upon you but the terms of the notice should place both parties in a position of equal advantage and should put neither party at a disadvantage. Any other course would amount to treachery, and God loves not those who are guilty of treachery." (Ch. VIII, v. 58).

Islam makes it obligatory upon a Muslim State to come to the assistance of Muslims who are being persecuted on account of their faith, but even in such a case treaties and engagements must be scrupulously observed. (Ch. VIII, v. 72).

Islam regards war as abnormal and permits recourse to it only in exceptional circumstances. Even when war becomes unavoidable Islam requires that its scope must be limited as far as possible. The conception of total war is strongly condemned by Islam. The Quran does not permit recourse to war except as a defensive measure and even then does not permit its extension beyond unavoidable limits. (Ch. II, v. 190) Even in the case of defensive war the Quran does not permit the commencement of hostilities without due notice. Nor does Islam permit the use of weapons or devices which are calculated to cause destruction on a wide scale except by way of answer to their use by the enemy. Islam forbids the killing or capture in the course of war of non-combatants, ministers of religion, scholars devoted to the intellectual service of the community, teachers of religion, women, children and old men. Nor does it permit destruction of property or sources of wealth merely for the sake of causing damage or injury to the enemy. Such destruction is permitted only in cases where it becomes necessary for the direct prosecution of war. The Holy Prophet of Islam was particularly sensitive towards any injury being inflicted upon women. On one occasion, after a battle, he noticed a woman among the dead. He was greatly incensed and observed that this was most reprehensible in the eyes of God. To all appearance the woman had joined in the fighting and had been killed in the course of fighting, but even then the Prophet condemned her killing. The Prophet's attitude was that fighting is the business of men and that normally women do not enter the field of battle for the purpose of fighting. Their presence near

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

the scene of fighting is normally for the purpose of humanitarian ministrations and activities. If, therefore, a woman is found among the killed in the field of battle, the moral responsibility for her death would lie upon the opposite side unless it could be clearly shown that the woman had participated in actual fighting. The companions of the Prophet were so impressed by the Prophet's reaction to this incident that on subsequent occasions they refrained from attacking women even when they actually took part in fighting. In the course of a battle a party of Muslim soldiers observed that one of the enemy was taking advantage of the shelter afforded by a rock to attack any of them that might pass within his range. One of them skirted round the rock and jumped upon the person who was intent upon attacking the Muslims on the other side of the rock, but on discovering that the assailant was a woman in man's attire, he let her go and returned to his party explaining that he dared not kill her as he knew that this would distress the Prophet.

If war is forced upon a Muslim State and at any stage in the course of war the enemy should propose a truce and wish to make peace, Islam directs that the Muslim billigerent State should be eager to avail itself of the opportunity to put an end to hostilities and should not, for the purpose of pressing an advantage, decline a truce even if there should be reason to suppose that truce is being sought by the other side for some ulterior purpose. The Quran says: *"If the enemy should incline towards peace do thou incline towards it also and put thy trust in God; He is the Seeing, the Knowing. If the enemy should design treachery, God will suffice thee and safeguard thee for it is He who has, on all occasions, been thy succour."* (Ch. VIII, v. 61, 62).

Islam does not permit the taking of prisoners of war save in consequence and in the course of a regular declared war. The Quran utters a stern warning against attempts to kidnap people or to capture them as prisoners on superficial grounds, for instance, that they were engaged in a border raid. Very often the object in such cases is to use these unfortunate people as forced labourers and thus derive advantage from their helplessness. The Quran says: *"It is not permissible to take prisoners except in consequence of a regular and declared war. You desire the quick benefits of this life but God desires the lasting welfare*

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

of mankind and God is Mighty, Wise. If you will not desist from such practices you will surely be overtaken by calamity." (Ch. VIII, v. 67, 68).

Islam, being a religion, gives directions not only with regard to international relations but also furnishes guidance with regard to the regulation of inter-religious relations. It is obvious that the peaceful adjustment of relations between the followers of different faiths is as essential for the maintenance of peace between different sections of mankind as the peaceful regulation of international relations. Indeed, it often happens that inter-religious tension and disturbances become the direct cause of a breach of international peace, for, when religious passions are roused, bigotry and fanaticism obscure even political interests.

In addition to securing absolute freedom of conscience, Islam seeks to establish the widest measure of tolerance. The Quran says: *"There shall be no compulsion in matters of conscience. Guidance has been made manifest and been distinguished from error."* (Ch. II, v. 256). It teaches that persons and things held in reverence by other people, should not be treated with disrespect by Muslims. For instance, the teachings of Islam concerning the Unity of God are absolutely uncompromising. Yet, Muslims are forbidden the use of harsh expressions with reference to idols and false gods whom others revere and regard as sacred, the principle being that those who believe in them may be as devoted to them and as sensitive on the score of their sanctity as the Muslims are with regard to God and those whom they revere as prophets. If the Muslims desire that other people should revere those to whom sanctity is assigned by Islam, they must themselves show respect for those whom other people hold in reverence. The Quran says: *"Do not use harsh language for those whom other people worship beside God, for then they, in their ignorance, out of a desire for retaliation, may indulge in abuse of God. You must recognize that each people is devoted to that which it holds sacred. All will ultimately return to God and He will make manifest to them the evil of what they practised."* (Ch. VI, v. 109)

It is an error to suppose that a person who believes in a false doctrine thereby renders himself the object of divine displeasure and de-

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

serves divine chastisement. If a person has had no access to right guidance and his attention has not been drawn to it, the mere fact of his being in error would not impose penal responsibility upon him, though, of course, being in error, he would deprive himself of the benefits of right guidance. He would become liable to divine displeasure and chastisement only when his error leads him into wickedness and active wrong-doing, or when he persists in his error in spite of guidance having been made manifest to him. The Quran says: *"O people of the Book, our Messenger has come to you with guidance which he makes manifest to you after a long period of time had elapsed since the last Prophet who came to you with guidance, lest you should urge that nobody had come to you with guidance and warning from God. Lo! now guidance and warning have come to you and God possesses power and competence in respect of all things."* (Ch. V, v. 19).

An important aspect of social relations is that which concerns a person's domestic relationships. The general principle laid down in this respect by the Quran is: *"Act benevolently towards your parents and near of kin, the orphans and the needy and the next door neighbour and the distant neighbour and your partners in business and co-workers and wayfarers and travellers and those over whom you exercise authority."* (Ch. IV, v. 36) At another place the Quran says: *"And render to those relatives for whose welfare you are responsible, their rightful due out of that which belongs to you and to the poor and the needy, but bestow not with a view to receive a return nor squander your substance."* (Ch. XVII, v. 26)

Islam regards the married state as normal and as most conducive towards the full evolution of human character, (Ch. XXXIII, v. 50) but those who are unable to find suitable mates are enjoined to safeguard their chastity in all respects. (Ch. XXIV, v. 33) Extra marital relations are prohibited altogether (Ch. XVII, v. 32) and celibacy and monasticism are strongly disapproved as harmful devices which have no divine sanction. (Ch LVII, v. 27).

In the matter of the choice of a mate Islam emphasizes that greater weight should be attached to disposition and true piety than to the external circumstances of looks, wealth or rank. The Holy Prophet has said, "Some people marry for the sake of beauty, others for rank

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

and others for wealth, but you should seek in marriage a virtuous and pious companion."

The basis of domestic life is mutual obligations and the promotion of each other's welfare and happiness. The Holy Prophet has said, "The best of you are those who behave best towards their mates"; and again, "Do not adopt a critical attitude towards your mate on account of any quality that you do not approve of, for there must be many qualities in your mate that you like and approve."

Islam has made a woman absolute owner of her property over which she has complete powers of management, use and disposal. A husband has no right to interfere with the management or disposal of his wife's property by her.

While children have been repeatedly exhorted to obedience and respectful and kindly behaviour towards their parents, parents have been given no authority over their children's property; though in the case of a son or daughter dying in the lifetime of a parent or parents the surviving parent or parents is or are entitled to a fixed share of inheritance in the property left by the deceased.

Islam prescribes strict rules for promoting personal and social hygiene and securing the purity and wholesomeness of food. It lays down a whole code of social behaviour and good manners.

Concerning the relationship of masters and servants the Holy Prophet has laid down, among other injunctions, that a servant should be clothed and fed in the same manner as the master clothes and feeds himself and should not be asked to perform tasks beyond his strength, nor such as would tend to humiliate him. A master is required to co-operate with his servants in their work so that they should feel encouraged and should entertain no sense of inferiority. Wages must be promptly paid. In case of a dispute with regard to the adequacy of wages, the matter may be settled by judicial determination.

The Quran requires that the terms of all loans and contracts must be reduced to writing. (Ch. II, v. 283). No valid contract can be made on behalf of a woman, minor or a person of defective intelligence except through his or her guardian or a properly accredited agent. (Ch. II, v.282).

There are detailed instructions designed to promote probity and

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

integrity in commercial transactions. A seller is bound to disclose any defect in goods or articles offered for sale which may not be known to the buyer. Nothing may be sold in bulk without ascertainment of its weight or measurement. Goods and commodities must be allowed to come into the market so that the owner becomes aware of ruling prices before a bargain is struck. Prices must be uniform for all buyers, and no discrimination is permissible except in the case of some personal relationship between the seller and the buyer, for instance, when the buyer is a relative, teacher, friend, neighbour or fellow trader of the seller.

Islam has also laid down rules for the regulation of the relationship between landlord and tenant which aim at securing an equitable distribution of the produce between the two. Devices and practices which would operate unfairly are prohibited.

The most valuable contribution made by Islam in the cultural sphere is through the definition of moral values and standards.

To begin with, Islam has abolished all privilege and class distinctions. Righteous conduct is the only badge of honour. The Quran says: *"We have divided you into tribes and nations for greater facility of identification and intercourse, but the most honoured among you in the sight of God is he who leads the purest and most righteous life."* (Ch. XLIX, v.13)

Islam teaches that natural instincts and tendencies are not in themselves good or bad, moral or immoral; it is their use and application that make them good or bad. The proper use and application of natural instincts and tendencies, that is to say, their operation within their proper and respective spheres with a good and pure motive makes them moral. Their abuse or improper **use** makes them immoral. Islam goes on to classify morals as being of two kinds: those that relate to acts of the mind and those that relate to acts of the body. It prohibits evils of both kinds. For instance, the Quran says: *"Approach not evil, manifest or hidden"* (Ch. VI, v.151) and again, *"Whether you make that manifest which is in your minds (that is to say, whether you act in accordance with it) or whether you keep it secret (that is to say, whether you keep it confined to your minds and do not translate it into action) God will call you to account for it."* (Ch. II, v 284). It

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

teaches, however, that *"good morals overcome and prevail against bad* morals." (Ch. XI, v. 114).

Islam does not confine the conception of morals to acts or omissions which affect other people, it includes within that conception acts or omissions which affect the individual himself alone (i. e. thoughts and designs). For instance, according to Islam not only is a person who is openly arrogant immoral but equally immoral is a person who, though outwardly meek and humble, nurses pride in the secret corners of his heart, for though he has not injured another he injures and sullies his own soul. The Quran says: *"They were presumptuous in their hearts and were also very overbearing."* (Ch. XXV, v.21) and again *"Some thoughts of the mind are sinful."* (Ch. XLIX, v.12) A person, however, who suppresses evil thoughts whenever they enter his mind, is worthy of commendation, as one who suppresses his virtuous and beneficient inclinations, is likely to fall into evil. The Quran says: *"God will recompense those with good who act virtuously and avoid all manner of evil, whether great or small, and when urged towards evil, check themselves and turn away from it."* (Ch. LIII, v.31, 32)

Islam seeks to bring about moral uplift through the regulation of natural instincts. For instance, it regulates the natural instinct of revenge both among individuals and in the community as a whole by prescribing, *"If a man commits a trespass his punishment shall be proportionate thereto"*; (Ch. II, v.194) and goes on *"The recompense of evil is a penalty proportionate thereto, but he who forgives the trespass of another intending thereby to effect a reformation (in the offender) shall have his reward with God. Surely, God loves not transgressors."* (Ch. XLII, v.40). The last part of the verse means that he who forgives when forgiveness would promote disorder or strife and he who punishes when punishment would tend to harden the offender are both transgressors and God loves not such conduct.

Where the aggrieved person is weak and the aggressor is powerful, revenge might take the form of abuse and fault-finding. This is prohibited. Nor is a Muslim encouraged to sulk or cut off social relations with another unless this last should be imposed as a social penalty. Even the entertainment of spiteful feelings is prohibited. The Quran

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

says: *"We have driven out spite from the hearts of the believers."* (Ch. XV, v. 47).

In the same manner the natural instinct of love may be converted into a moral quality. For this purpose we are required to observe proper gradation in our affections in accordance with moral principles and to have greater regard to gratitude for benefits received in the past than to the hope of receiving benefits in the future (for, the former is an obligation and the later mere self-interest) and to subordinate our immediate inclinations to remoter good. The Quran says: *"If your parents and your children and your brothers and your sisters and your wives and your husbands and your kinsfolk and the property which you have acquired and your business, the dullness of which you fear, and your dwellings and your homes which you love, are dearer to you than God and His Apostle and striving in the path of God, then wait till God issues a decree concerning you; God loves not those who ignore their responsibilities."* (Ch. IX, v. 24). Here we are taught to observe due gradation in our affections and attachments. God and His Apostle are to be loved above human relationships and possessions. Parents should be accorded greater devotion than wife or husband and children. The call of the motherland is to be obeyed in preference to the needs of one's family. Compared with the love of parents for their children the love of children for their parents is a higher moral quality, for the former is largely instinctive and the latter has the quality of gratitude for benefits already received. In the same way, Muslims are exhorted to regulate their affections for their spouses and their children in such manner as not to put in jeopardy the beneficent evolution of their characters. The Quran says: *"O believers, real love is this that you save yourselves, your spouses and your children from destruction."* (Ch. LXVI, v.6

The Quran details instructions with regard to the regulation and control of all natural instincts thus emphasizing the principle that it is their proper regulation and control that converts them into moral qualities; to permit them to work unrestrained and uncontrolled would be immoral.

The Quran also emphasizes the different stages or gradations of good and evil. It says: *"God enjoins equitable dealing, beneficence and*

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

treatment of fellow beings as if they were blood relations and forbids all evil, that which is not manifest as well as that which is manifest and offends the feelings of others, and that which amounts to trespass against them. He admonishes you so that you may be rightly guided." (Ch. XVI, v.90). This verse divides virtues and vices into three classes each and these six classes cover between them the whole moral field.

The first stage of virtue is equitable dealing, that is to say, a person should deal with others as he is dealt with by them and should repay the good done to him at least with an equal measure of good. For an injury done to him he must not seek to exact a penalty in excess of the injury. This is the lowest standard of virtue. The next higher stage is beneficence, that is to say, a person must repay the good that is done to him by a larger measure of good and should forgive those who trespass against him save when forgiveness would promote disorder or strife.

The highest stage of virtue is that a person should spread beneficence all around him irrespective of any good done to him or injury inflicted upon him.

There are also three stages of evil which must be avoided. The first is, evil that is not manifest or apparent, for instance, evil thoughts and evil designs; the next is, when a person's acts and conduct are such as to displease or offend others and of which they disapprove, for instance, loose or vulgar talk, falsehood, arrogance and ill manners; the last stage is, conduct which injures other people and amounts to open violation of moral rules.

By stressing these different stages of virtue and vice Islam has rendered it easy for every Muslim to carry out a continuous moral check-up of himself and in consequence to take steps and adopt measures for his moral improvement.

The Quran goes on to prescribe the method through which vices may be eradicated and virtues cultivated. The objective is, as explained earlier, that man should become a reflection of divine attributes. In this connection it must be remembered that according to Islam a child is born pure. Evil enters from outside and a person can safeguard himself against it, or, having succumbed to it, can cleanse himself of its consequences through prayer and true repentance concerning which also the Quran furnishes detailed guidance.

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

For further information on Islam write to :

Secretary for Missionary Work

Ahmadiyya Community

Qadian (India)

PL-0592

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org

Printed at :

Jai Hind Printing Press, Nehiu Garden Road, Jullundur City.

Digitized by Panjab Digital Library | www.panjabdigilib.org